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SALEM FILM FEST HOSTS WORLD PREMIERE OF SIPE: SEX, LIES, AND THE PRIESTHOOD

Salem MA, February 4, 2021 – As part of its winter series preceding its festival dates, **Salem Film Fest** is presenting the World Premiere of the documentary *Sipe: Sex, Lies, and the Priesthood*. Streaming of the film will be available starting on Saturday, February 20, 2021, at 4:00 p.m. EST on [Salem Film Fest's streaming channel](#). The one-hour film is produced by Zingerplatz Pictures and BishopAccountability.org. A free live panel with the wife, friends, and scholars of the subject, Richard Sipe, will take place at 8:00 p.m. EST on Saturday, February 20th, with a live chat function. The film and discussions will then be available via Salem Film Fest's video-on-demand channel **through Thursday, March 4**. Ticket link and information can be accessed at [SalemFilmFest.com](#).

The documentary, directed by Joe Cultrera (*Hand of God*, Frontline, 2006), explores the life and work of the late **A.W. Richard Sipe** (1932–2018), the revolutionary scholar of sex, celibacy, and clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic church. Sipe's key role in the Boston abuse crisis was dramatized in the Academy Award-winning movie *Spotlight* (2015).

Long before 2002, when the *Boston Globe's* Spotlight team made it headline news, Richard Sipe was a key figure in the Catholic church and its problems with sex. As a Benedictine therapist-monk, Sipe helped hundreds of priests in their struggles with celibacy. *Sipe: Sex, Lies, and the Priesthood*, takes us back to those days and Sipe's upbringing in Minnesota, and forward to his work with survivors and his groundbreaking books: [A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy](#) and [Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis](#).

Director Joe Cultrera currently resides back in his hometown of Salem, Massachusetts – the setting of one of his previous documentaries, *Hand of God*. That film explored similar issues from the intimate perspective of his brother's abuse by a priest and the repercussions inside his Italian American family. "*Hand of God* came from a survivor's point of view," says Cultrera. "This film is a deep dive into the world of the clergy. It's constructed around a series of conversations I had with Richard and his wife Marianne at their home in La Jolla, California. We took a road trip to Minnesota to meet his family; visited his old monastery and Jeff Anderson, one of the leading attorneys for abuse survivors. The film investigates the psychology of the system that produced the perpetrators. Richard came from that system, left it, and then spent the rest of his life helping survivors by peeling away its layers and confronting the church."

Richard Sipe died in 2018, but his influence is still strong. The recent downfall of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, documented in a [report released by the Vatican](#) in November 2020, was a direct result of Sipe's activism – he had been the canary in the coal mine, [speaking out](#) about McCarrick's misconduct when everyone else was silent.

“The conversations in this movie are amazing,” says producer Terence McKiernan. “It’s imaginatively shot by Hugh Walsh, managing to weave in Richard’s theme of the mask, relating his love of art to the Catholic system of secrecy. Berklee College of Music’s Grammy Award-winner Claudio Ragazzi created a beautiful score that conveys the tragedy and the empathy of Sipe’s life work.”

On the premiere night of the film, the live panel discussion will begin at 8:00 p.m. EST on Salem Film Fest’s streaming channel. Panelists include Richard’s wife Marianne Benkert Sipe, survivor Phil Saviano, scholar of religion Robert Orsi, and scholar of sexuality Kara French. Brief bios of the panelists are below. The movie and panel will remain available for streaming rental from February 20, 2021, through March 4, 2021.

See the [trailer](#) and the [film’s website](#).

The producers and director would like to thank Marianne Benkert Sipe for her friendship and support, and Maidie and Leon Podles, whose generosity made this film possible.

ABOUT SALEM FILM FEST

Since 2007, [Salem Film Fest](#) has brought the world’s best documentaries and their makers to Boston’s North Shore. The 14th edition will run in a completely virtual format, March 19–28, 2021. The Fest is the largest all-documentary international Film Festival in Massachusetts and this year’s version will include virtual Q&A and panels with the fest’s filmmakers.

About BishopAccountability.org

Founded in 2003, [BishopAccountability.org](#) maintains the world’s largest archive of documents on the problem of clergy sexual abuse. We conduct research on child abuse by priests and religious and on the management of those cases.

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Panelists:

Marianne Benkert Sipe is a psychiatrist and expert witness specializing in Catholic clergy abuse and the lives of religious sisters; she and her husband Richard Sipe frequently worked together on abuse cases.

Phil Saviano, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse by Fr. David Holley, has been an activist since the early 1990s. In 1997, he established a New England chapter of the national victims' advocacy group SNAP. The movie *Spotlight* tells part of his story; he is now a board member of BishopAccountability.org and represents Mexican folk artists through his import business www.vivaoaxacafolkart.com.

Robert Orsi is Grace Craddock Nagle Chair of Catholic Studies at Northwestern University, where he is also Professor of Religious Studies, History, and American Studies. He is the author of many books, including the award-winning *Madonna of 115th Street*, and is working on *Give Us Boys* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming in 2022), about sexual abuse in Jesuit prep schools. Orsi is a leader of the University of Notre Dame / BishopAccountability.org partnership [Gender, Sex, and Power: Towards a History of Clergy Sex Abuse in the U.S. Catholic Church](#).

Kara French is Associate Professor of History at Salisbury University and author of [Against Sex: Identities of Sexual Restraint in Early America](#) (University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming in June 2021). She is a researcher in the [Gender Sex, and Power](#) partnership, where she is working on celibacy in the Catholic abuse crisis.

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